

Memorial Day

2009-05-25

### A Legacy of Liberty

In the opening lines of the poem “In Flanders Fields”...In Flanders Field, the poppies blow/Between the crosses, row on row...” was the inspiration for Moina Michael’s idea of wearing red poppies on Memorial Day. When the Overseas War Secretaries met at the annual conference in New York City before the Armistice was signed at the end of WWI, the delegates gave Ms. Michael’s \$10 in recognition of her help with the conference. She took the money and spent it on 25 red silk poppies to hand out to participants. (Some say she made them herself.) From there she began her campaign to make the poppy a national symbol of remembrance. Two years later the American Legion adopted it at its own conference, and poppies have symbolized Memorial Day ever since.

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, honored guests and most respected Veteran’s. It is my honor to speak to you on this day, in this beautiful setting that honors the silent. It’s my job to speak to you and your job is to listen...but if you finish before I do...please let me know.

I don’t know if you read the Tribune yesterday. I often don’t appreciate the cartoons on the opinion page. But I found this one to be rather telling: It shows a man standing by his BBQ, with spatula in hand, and says “because this is America, I think you should attend a Memorial Day parade to honor those who died fighting for democracy. And, because its America, I think that when you’re at the parade, you should stand when the flag passes by...because this is America, I think you should also remove your hat. And because this is America, I think you should also place your hand over your heart. But you’re free to completely ignore what I think...because this is America.”

We have gathered here many times over the years, both on Memorial Day and on Veteran’s Day. I believe there is a common link and strong bond between these two cherished holidays. And I believe it is all because they both have established a legacy of liberty.

It began with the founding of our Nation. It is stated strongly in the Preamble to the Constitution. “secure the Blessings of Liberty”; the Declaration of Independence...”certain unalienable rights, that among these

are life, liberty”; the Pledge of Allegiance, “with liberty and justice for all”; and probably the most recognized quote from Patrick Henry, “ I know not what course others may take; but for me, give me liberty or give me death!” In speeches throughout history, the word liberty is used time and again.

“Freedom, autonomy, sovereignty, independence, self-determination, self-direction, self-government and self-rule.” These are all the defining expressions of Liberty. These, joined with the intense desire to not let down their fellow Soldier, Sailor, Marine, Airman and their country, are the reasons we are here today, to never forget who and what they gave to establish that legacy of liberty.

When one looks at our history, it is hard to define what may be the most historical moment in our country’s young life. Was it the election of our first President, George Washington? Was it the most tormented time in our history with President Lincoln during the Civil War? Was it the entry into WWII with President Roosevelt? Was it the decision to drop the bomb by President Truman? Was it the assassination of President John F. Kennedy? Was it the fall of the Soviet Union with President Reagan? Or was it the election of the first African-American President with President Obama?

Although all, in their own way were historic, I would submit to you that it was none of these that, in my mind are the most historic. I believe the most historic moment in our history was the transfer of power from our first President to the second President. When John Adams took the oath of office as the second President of the United States, relieving George Washington through a democratic election, it was the first time in history that a smooth, civilized, non-confrontational, and peaceful transition of government took place in a democratic society. It was the continuance of our legacy of liberty and the foundation by which all other transitions in our history would take place.

But there have also been times when we have been called to duty. To preserve and protect...and that is why we are here today... to remember those that were called and have given the final sacrifice for the legacy. We Americans do not want war. We detest war. But we also hate bullies and those that wish to not honor that which our Creator has granted us. I believe emphatically, that in order to detour conflict, it is our responsibility to strongly prepare for it.

In 1932, Will Rogers sent a letter to a Senator: “ I want to tell you, war is a business with some of these countries. When a war shows up they don’t have to stop and put in a draft and sing songs and make three minute speeches and appoint dollar-a-year men. All that has been attended to long before war ever broke out. All their soldiers are trained between wars-not after one starts. You see, we have been lucky that way, all of our wars have waited on us till we could get ready. But one day we may have one where the enemy won’t wait.”

He also said that: “Spain discovered half the world, her ships were on every sea, but she let her navy run down and wound up in the class Z league. Look at Holland, great country, big as England...but did you ever hear of them when they talk of what the big powers want? No, you would think they were Rhode Island. Why? No Navy. Brazil is bigger than England, France, Italy, and Japan and has more natural resources than all of them combined. Yet she couldn’t get a Chamber of Commerce Membership rally. Same old answer: no Navy.”

And finally he said in 1933, “Well, lots of war news in the papers today. I knew it was coming when I saw that we had cut down on our Army and Navy. If you want to know when a war is coming, just watch the U.S....and see when it starts cutting down on its defense. It’s the surest barometer in the world.”

We owe it to the men and women, who we honor, to continue to be well prepared. Our support for the folks in uniform is essential if we wish to carry on that legacy of liberty. Not to force, not to conquer, not to coerce but to preserve. When someone was asked to define freedom...a man said that, “you can’t really know it until you don’t have it.”

The legacy of liberty is indeed our responsibility. It is our duty. And, no one said it better than the man who became the second President of the United States...John Adams: “Posterity! You will never know, how much it cost the present Generation, to preserve your Freedom! I hope you will make good Use of it. If you do not, I shall repent in Heaven, that I ever took the Pains to preserve it.”

It has been the responsibility of past generations, it is the responsibility of this generation and the responsibility of future generations to do the same. It is all of our responsibility to continue our legacy of liberty.

Thank you ladies and gentlemen and my brothers in arms.

Frank Mecham  
First District Supervisor.